



**Interviewee: Linda Greenlaw**

**Title: Mishap on the high seas**

**Duration: 6 minutes, 40 seconds**

### **Introduction**

Are our older selves as fit as our younger selves?

In this episode of Bookpod, fishing boat captain Linda Greenlaw talks about *Seaworthy*, a book about a 56-day epic disaster that tested her mettle after a ten-year departure from bluewater fishing.

### **Presentation**

If I were in fifth grade doing a book report, I would say that this is a book about someone who absolutely fell in love with her life at the age of 19 and that was when she began commercial fishing. I know it sounds cliché to say you're drawn to or taken with something, but I love what I do. I like the way I feel when I'm at sea and I am passionate about catching fish.

I gave up swordfishing after twenty years of absolutely being in love with what I was doing. I was in my late



thirties and I was at the top of my game. I was running the *Hannah Boden*, which is the boat featured in The Perfect Storm. I had a great deal of success and just felt it was time to move on.

All my girl friends were married with children. I felt perhaps I'd missed something along the way. Maybe it was my turn to do that and I wanted to try doing that before it was too late.

So, I decided I'd go home to this little island off the coast of Maine, Isle au Haut, where I call home. And it was nice because I could still make my living on the water. I bought a lobster boat and a bunch of traps.

I never did get married or have kids, but I've sort of learned that my plan was flawed. I moved to a little island where there are basically three single men. I say in one of my other books that two of them were gay and the third one's my cousin. That's not too much of a stretch.

The more that time marched on, the less likely it become



that I would ever be able to get back to what I professed as my first love. A phone call came in two years ago. I said yes and I'm very happy that I did. You know, people say, you know, you can never go back or you can never go home. Well, guess what? You can.

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Certainly if the trip that I write about in *Seaworthy* had been my first trip ever, there never would have been a second trip. It did seem like everything that could possibly go wrong, did.

Twenty-four hours away from the dock into this 30-day adventure, the main engine basically blows up and I'm on the end of a towline heading for Nova Scotia for repairs.

And that's a particularly bad feeling as a captain. Period. But, you know, in this trip that I was assuming would be my great comeback, that wasn't exactly the way I wanted to start. I certainly didn't anticipate all the problems that we had, whether they were, you know, nature or self-



created.

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The method of fishing that we do for swordfish is called long-lining. I had 30 miles of gear in the water. It's one single strand, 30 miles long. I made a very legal set. And we fish with hooks. Onto this 30-mile line are attached baited hooks. Set it at night. Made a very legal set. Everything's good. Got up the next morning and grabbed the end of the gear and starting hauling it back.

Well, the captain's job hauling the gear back is on deck with the crew. So I don't have any visual electronics. I can't see exactly where I am.

During the course of the day, we got buzzed by a plane, a Canadian fisheries plane. Didn't think too much of it. And the third time they buzzed us, I went to the wheelhouse thinking something must be wrong. And I could have thrown up when I saw the chart plotter that indicated I was four miles north of the line where I should have been.



I didn't find out until after I was released from jail what had happened. When I was arrested, I ended up leaving a mile of gear in the water. I said, "This is the least of my problems. You know, a mile of gear. I just need to go in and get this taken care of."

I found out after I'd been released from jail, a friend of mine was steaming out to the fishing grounds, came across the mile that I'd left behind, picked it up. It had clearly been run over by a ship. It was all covered with bottom paint and it was all balled up instead of strung out in a single mile.

So, then I knew that my gear had been run over by a ship and towed, you know, into illegal territory. I certainly didn't know that at the time.

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Nearly losing a man overboard is far worse to me than my being arrested. Being arrested, yeah, it's a blemish on my



record. It's embarrassing. It's humiliating. But you know what? It was a stupid mistake. I paid for it and life goes on.

If we'd lost a man overboard in the conditions that we were fishing, he would have been gone. There's just no way I would have been able to get the boat back to him. He'd have sunk below the surface. So I just, you know, had his life flashing before my eyes. It was a very close call and it was extremely terrorizing.

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When you're at sea, you are definitely in a world apart. You're all about what you're doing. It is the epitome of being in the time, in the here and the now. We refer to it as being in the "Grand Banks Bubble." You mark time in a different way. I don't know what day of the week it is. I might not know what time of the day it is. I've never worn a wristwatch.

But I do know what the moon is doing. I know if it's the first quarter, how many days to the full moon. I know how



much bait is left. I know how many sets we've made. I know how many fish we have. I know how much gear is in the water or on the boat at any given time. And that's the way we sort of mark our progress and our place in the world.

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I think that one of the main themes in *Seaworthy* is, "Do the things that you gain in maturity compensate for the things that fade with youth?" My answer to that is yes. I like to think that I dealt with everything as well as I could have.

Would I have dealt with them the same way as a younger captain? I don't think so. I think I would have been far more frustrated. And that's not to say that I wasn't frustrated during the course of this trip. But, you know, as a younger person I think you deal with things in different ways.

### **Valedictory**

Now the captain of a lobster boat, Linda Greenlaw is also



the author of the Jane Bunker mystery series.

Bookpod producer is Barbara Finkelstein. Music is by Kevin MacLeod.

See you next time on Bookpod, home to writers of lasting value.

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